

SEP Report

1. Student Information

Faculty/Major	Science/ Life Sciences
Host University	University of Pennsylvania
NUS Semester and Year of Exchange (eg. AY14/15 Semester 1)	AY15/16 Semester 1

2. Study at Host University

Please provide information on the academics at your host university:

- **Studying or learning culture at your host university. How were classes conducted?**
- **What did you like most or dislike most about the academics at your host University?**
- **Advice on module registration and module mapping**

The classes conducted were really similar to those conducted in NUS in the sense that it was a lecture and tutorial style. The classes were shorter - about 3 hours a week instead of 4- but the lectures were more frequent. For instance, we had class for 1 hour every alternate day. I felt that this breakdown of classes was more effective in terms of learning as we had a refresher course every alternate day which made studying for that particular course much easier. The lectures were highly interactive, with more class involvement for smaller classes. Most biology classes had more than 1 guest lecturer, which I felt was really good exposure especially since biology is a constantly evolving field.

I liked the idea that the teaching assistants had office hours on top of appointments, which I felt was better especially if you only needed to clarify one or two questions. Each exchange student was also paired with an academic advisor whom we met once a month. I found this to be very useful as we had someone we could ask for help regarding administrative matters, particularly in the first few months of our exchange as the online platforms and resources were fairly unfamiliar to me.

For module registration, there is a pre registration period which begins about a month before the semester begins. I would advise students to enroll in modules during that period to have a higher chance of obtaining their desired modules. There is also an online platform available which provides reviews and difficulty ratings of each module offered in UPenn (penncourserereview.com). I would suggest looking at this website for potential modules before registering for them as some modules are very challenging. Before leaving for UPenn, your assigned academic advisor will be in contact to help should there be any problems. However, the professors of UPenn do not upload the syllabus for their modules. Thus, during the mapping period, one would have to email the professors directly to obtain the recent syllabus for the module mapping process.

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Please list the courses that you took during SEP. (Please take note that the list of modules available to exchange students at the host university are subject to change. This table merely serves as reference.)

Host University			NUS Equivalent		
Module code	Course title	ECTS Credit	Module code	Course title	Modular credit
BIOL 251	Molecular and Cellular Neurobiology	1.5 CU	LSM 3215	Neuronal Signaling and Memory	4
BIOL 448	Principles of Drug Action	1 CU	LSM 3211	Fundamental Pharmacology	4
BIOL 354	Developmental Biology	1 CU	LSM 3233	Developmental Biology	4
CRIM 270	Biosocial Criminology	1 CU		USP Science	4
HSOC 275	Medical Sociology	1 CU		USP Arts	4

2. Accommodation

What kind of accommodation did you stay in during your exchange (eg. on campus / off campus)?

Would you recommend this accommodation to future outgoing students?

Do you have any other suggestions?

For UPenn, it is compulsory for incoming exchange students to stay on campus. I lived in a suite with 3 other roommates in Gregory College House. This accommodation had common kitchens and a basement with study lounges, printing facilities and recreational activities such as table tennis and foosball. This accommodation did not provide air conditioning or electrical fans in the rooms, although heating is provided. Thus, it can get quite warm during the first few weeks of the Fall semester or ending weeks of the Spring semester. Nonetheless, I would recommend this accommodation to any Biology exchange student as it is just a 5 minute walk from here to the Biology buildings- although the price of the accommodation is quite high.

Other suggestions would be Sansom Place West or any of the high rises- namely, Harrison, Harnwell and Rodin. These places offer air conditioned rooms , providing a really conducive study environment at their rooftop lounges. Each college house also offers specific programmes such as language or film programmes. I would suggest reading up on each accommodation about these programmes before making your choice. Distance –wise, each faculty is about a 15-minute walk away, so I would not worry about getting to classes from each accommodation.

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3. Activities during SEP

Were there any activities organized by school/student group/external organizations at your host university which you would like to recommend to other students?

Living in Gregory College House, there was a brunch event once every 2 Sundays which was compulsory for each suite to participate in. This was a good roommate bonding session as we had to discuss what we would want to prepare and how to go about it.

For those exchange students who might feel homesick, there is a Singapore student association called Club SG! where exchange students can interact with full time Singaporeans studying at UPenn. This organization holds events for festivals such as Mid Autumn festival and gatherings for those who miss local cuisine.

4. Cost of Living

**Please provide an estimation of how much money you spent during your SEP?
Please list travel expenses separately.**

Accommodation: \$7000
Meal Plan: \$600
Insurance: \$600
Visa: \$300
Flight tickets: \$2500
Travel: \$2000

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5. Challenges

Did you face any challenging issues during your SEP stint? How did you overcome it/them?

One of the challenges I faced was living in the same apartment as 3 other Americans. Although we became quite good friends after living with each other for a semester, the beginning was quite a challenge as I felt slightly overwhelmed and afraid of any discrimination they might harbour before even talking to me. However, what helped was that they had met other Singaporeans who were studying in UPenn as full time undergraduates and that made me feel more comfortable sharing about myself. After a few shy exchanges, I realized that they were as curious about my culture as I was about theirs and before I knew it we would share how our day went with each other and I would find out more about American culture as well. This was definitely a step outside of my comfort zone as I was one of the few exchange students living in that College House but in doing so, it led to many more opportunities to interact with the local students, which I feel is the heart of a meaningful exchange experience.

6. Overall SEP Experience

Please write one paragraph about your exchange experience and attach some photos that represent your exchange experience.

Being the only NUS exchange student from Science, it would be an understatement to say that I was scared to embark on my exchange journey. I was both terrified and nervous as it would be my first time going overseas alone and not knowing anyone there. But looking back, I am glad that I went alone and that I was the only one from Science who exchanged in UPenn. This made me put in extra effort when the opportunity to interact with other exchange students or local students arrived. Being one of the rare few Biology exchange students in Penn really gave me a chance to interact with the local students and professors and learn about their ways of thinking and their approach towards the field of Biology. This was an enriching experience both academically and socially. I left Singapore with the aim of interacting with the local students and learning more about Biology and American culture but little did I expect that I would come back with so much more; learning about the cultures of Japan, Korea, Spain and many more through my friendships forged with other exchange students. Overall, it would be a lie to say that my perspective of the world has not changed after this exchange. It has not only changed my view of the world but also definitely shaped my development as a person and led me to realise that I was able to accomplish things which I never believed I was able to. This exchange definitely taught me that the only person capable of stopping me from achieving my goals is myself and it has shown me how I could

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overcome that.

7. Suggestions for future outgoing students

Please share any other suggestions for future outgoing students.

As exchange students, it is compulsory for us to be enrolled in a meal plan. However, the meal plans are really expensive and the one I was enrolled in consisted of \$1500 worth of Dining Dollars, which is credit that can be spent on campus food halls and cafes. During the semester, I realized that we were able to be enrolled under a graduate meal plan, which offered \$300 worth of credits instead which is a decent amount. Thus, during the meal plan application period, I would suggest looking into these graduate meal plans, which are more affordable.